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Lebanon: The Search for A New Order

A Research Paper

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Lebanon: The Search for A New Order (U)

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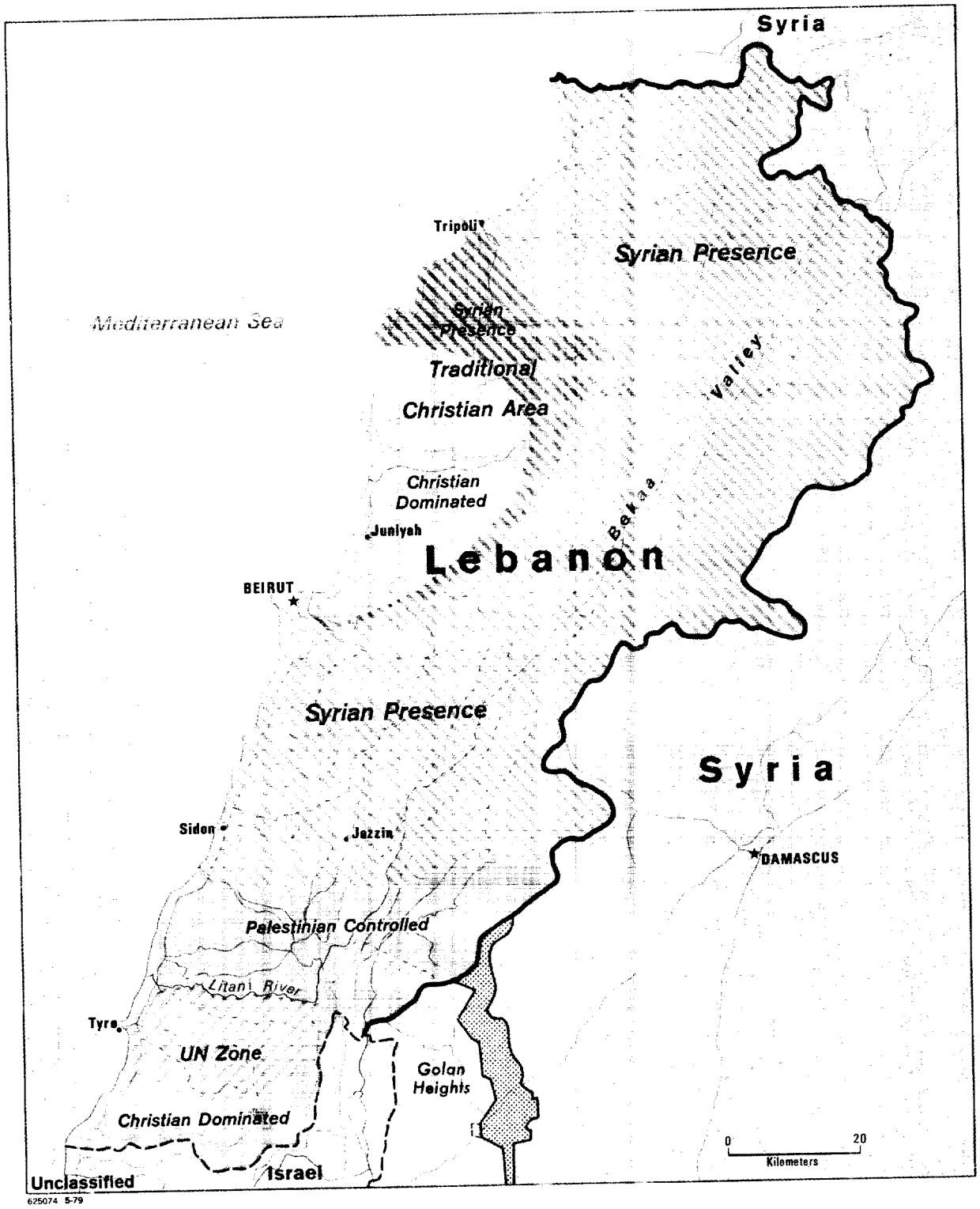


Lebanon: The Search for A New Order (U)

Numerous proposals for restructuring Lebanon's political system have been put forward over the past several years by contesting factions, but they have been unable to compromise their widely divergent views and reach a settlement. At present, the prospects for resuming a political dialogue appear slim, and President Sarkis seems to have limited ability, even with Syrian support, to set the process in motion. The previous proposals of the various factions, however, could provide a starting point for serious discussions, if the search for a new political order resumes. (S)

During the civil war of 1975-76 and into 1977, government leaders and the major Christian and Muslim factions devoted considerable effort to devising new political formulas on the assumption that eventually they would have to bargain hard on reconstituting Lebanon's shattered political system. (S)

As the post civil war stalemate continued, their interest in devising plans for a general political settlement waned, and it virtually disappeared as the focus of conflict shifted to fighting between Christian militiamen and Syrian troops. Attention became centered on immediate security matters, and discussions of fundamental political questions were relegated to the background. (S)

The proposals discussed in the past, however, will be revived if the groups begin serious negotiations about Lebanon's future. The outlook of Christians and Muslims is basically different. Maronites, who will largely determine the Christian position, believe that decentralization is the only way to deal with the problem of protecting their community from domination by the Muslims. Lebanese Muslims prefer strong central government. Most would probably support a restructuring of the 1943 National Covenant, an unwritten agreement apportioning political power on the basis of sectarian affiliation. The Covenant was based on census figures showing the Christians in a majority, and was therefore weighted in favor of the Maronites. The Muslims now insist that their larger population entitles them to a greater share of political power. Neither the Sunni nor the Shia Muslims have a unified position regarding a new political order; each sect is divided between conservatives and leftists who differ on the extent to which the National Covenant formula needs revising. (S)

The Baabda Declaration

Sulayman Franjiyah, Sarkis's predecessor, offered the first major proposal for political reorganization while the civil war was still raging. In February 1976, Franjiyah, in close collaboration with the Syrians, proposed a set of reforms that would modify the 1943 National Covenant. The most important points of the document, labeled the Baabda Declaration, were:

- Continuing the present confessional distribution of the three top governmental positions.

- Equal representation of Christians and Muslims in Parliament instead of the old National Covenant arrangement that gave the Christians a 6 to 5 legislative majority.

- Election of the prime minister by the Parliament instead of appointment by the president. There were also vague proposals for increasing the prime minister's powers relative to those of the president.

- Deconfessionalizing lesser civil service posts. Although this was designed to bring more Muslims into the bureaucracy, opening the jobs to merit competition would, in fact, probably increase the proportion of Christians because of their better education. (C)

The Baabda Declaration never gained much support. Christians at first seemed interested in it, but they showed little enthusiasm and expressed reservations about some provisions. They have since abandoned the idea of revision of the National Covenant in favor of their decentralization schemes. Although old-line conservative Muslims had hoped for a more decisive shift in power in their direction than the Declaration provided, they apparently concluded it was a step in the right direction and were willing to give it their support. Leftist Muslim groups rejected the plan outright, saying it failed to meet even their minimum demands for more political power. (C)

President Sarkis's Plan

President Sarkis said late last year that he believes the principles of the Baabda Declaration provide the basis for political reform in Lebanon. He particularly supports the provisions calling for a unified Lebanon, a strong central government, and a Maronite presidency. He rejected Camille Shamun's call in late 1978 for a federation. (S NF OC)

Sarkis, however, has not mounted a strong campaign for restructuring Lebanon's political system. His only recent initiative came last September when—partly in an attempt to appease the Christians—he announced a plan for administrative decentralization. He gave no details, but the plan basically provides for the creation of an unspecified number of provinces that would have wide responsibility for administrative, police, and some other matters. Top local government officials apparently would be appointed by the central government, rather than elected locally. (C)

The Christians

Maronite leaders generally agree that the 1943 National Covenant is outmoded, although they publicly refuse to concede that the Muslims are a majority. They want an entirely new formula, which will at a minimum protect the Christians against domination by any other group. The Maronites generally support "decentralization" as a workable solution, but have not yet come up with a unified or detailed exposition of what such an arrangement would entail. Some extremists—including militia chief Bashir Jumayyil—favor the partition of Lebanon into confessional ministates. Many moderates strongly disapprove of partition, believing that a Christian ministate would not be politically or militarily viable. None of the top Maronite leaders is irrevocably committed to partition, but almost all of them would prefer partition to domination by the Muslims. (S)

The Maronites envisage political decentralization as a division of the country into cantons along essentially confessional lines. The cantons would be part of a federal or a confederal state, with its capital at Beirut. The Maronites differ among themselves on the question of how much power the cantons should have, but in general they would give them a considerable degree of autonomy in such matters as taxation, education, justice, residence permits, and—most important of all—security. At the least the Maronite canton would not depend on the central government for protection; instead, its defense would be provided by Maronite militia, a Maronite brigade of the Army, or some similar arrangement. (C)

A central theme in the Maronites' concept of decentralization is the need for pluralism—a constitutional system that guarantees to each religious community the right to preserve its separate identity and culture. The Maronites see pluralism as their chief weapon against majority rule by the Muslims. (C)

Maronite thinking about the country's future was revealed at a meeting of the Lebanese Front—the umbrella organization for the four main Maronite organizations (the Phalangists, the National Liberal Party, Franjiyah's group, and the Order of Maronite Monks)—held in January 1977. Each of the Front's components presented a paper outlining general ideas for governing the country in the aftermath of the civil war. They made no attempt to agree on any plan, but the substance of their proposals was much the same. (C)

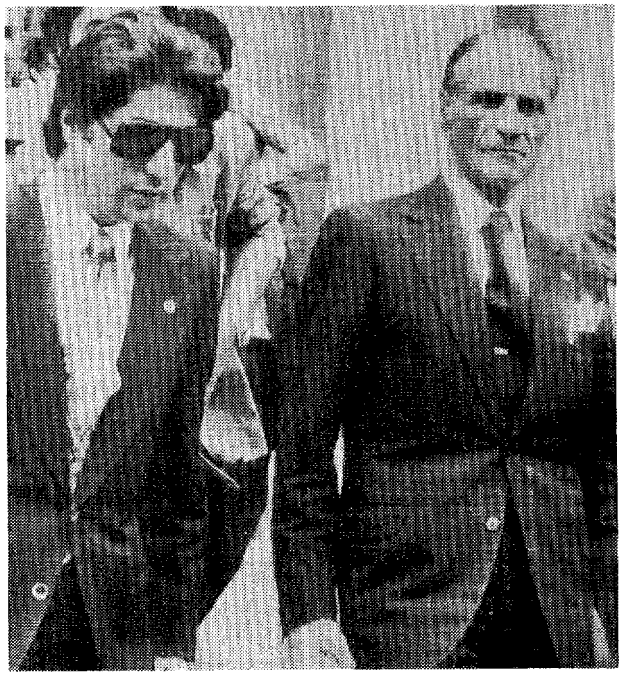
Maronite policy on restructuring the Lebanese political system has not changed greatly since the 1977 meeting. In a meeting held a year later, the Front adopted a charter that largely reaffirmed the 1977 principles, but still made no attempt to formulate an action program. The 1978 meeting was the last time the Front met to focus on devising a new political formula. The few statements made by individual Maronite leaders over the last years—although limited to vague generalities—deviate very little from the doctrines espoused in 1977. (S)

The Phalange Party paper called for the establishment of four cantons: Middle Lebanon, North Lebanon, South Lebanon, and Beirut. Each canton would have its own governor, council, and cabinet. Two of the classic functional attributes of national sovereignty—defense and financial affairs—would be controlled by the cantons. The paper proposed that each canton would have its own army, police force, and central bank, but did not spell out who would control foreign affairs.[1] The Phalangists proposed to maintain the traditional formula for apportioning the three highest national political offices on the basis of religion: a Maronite president, a Sunni Muslim prime minister, and a Shia Muslim speaker of the Chamber of Deputies. (C)

The Phalange at times has seemed to indicate it is less separatist-minded than some of the other Maronite groups. This is partly the result of a generation gap within Phalange ranks: the younger, militia-oriented leadership has focused on steps to preserve Maronite interests at any cost, while the older generation has sought to preserve these interests within a framework that left room for reconciliation with the Muslims and took into account Lebanon's position as part of the Arab world. (S NF NC)

In late 1978, Phalange leader Pierre Jumayyil said that partition would be a catastrophe and that the Lebanese must find a formula that would allow them to live together. He refused to use the labels "federation" or "confederation" because, he said, they evoke a negative response from Muslims. (U)

[1] Phalange leaders have indicated at various times since the meeting that the central government would make foreign policy and that a joint military command would have nominal control of the cantons' armies. (C)



Pierre Jumayyil (R), leader of the Phalange Party, and son Amin. Unclassified ©

The National Liberal Party paper in 1977 gave fewer details than that of the Phalangists. Within a few months, however, party leader Camille Shamun proposed a version of cantonalization that would stop just short of outright partition and relegate the central government to little more than a customs union. Judicial, legislative, military, financial, and cultural affairs would be the responsibility of the cantons. (C)

Shamun's scheme proposed two cantons plus a joint sector. One canton would be the traditional Maronite heartland, including eastern Beirut. The other canton would be composed of the western sector of Beirut—with the exception of the joint sector—plus the remainder of the country. The joint sector would be the commercial center of Beirut. Each canton would have a president, a prime minister, a chamber of deputies, and its own judicial system. (C)

On the national level, a six-member "Higher Council of Common Interests" would be composed of a representative of the principal religious communities, with each member taking a turn at a one-year tour as

Camille Shamun, leader of the National Liberal Party. Unclassified ©

Sulayman Franjiyah, leader of the northern Maronites. Unclassified ©

president. The council would make decisions by majority vote, but the cabinet of each of the cantons could veto the national government's decisions. (C)

In November 1978 Shamun, in his most recent specific comments on distribution of powers, urged adoption of a federal system and said the only alternative would be partition. He offered no details and did not discuss the relationship between his concept of a federation and the decentralization plan he offered in 1977, but he is probably inclined to try to safeguard Maronite interests by all but abolishing national institutions and transferring their powers to a canton. (S NF NC)

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Franjiyah's son Tony later reiterated the family's support for an accord providing for a single presidency and a single Lebanese army. He called, however, for a decentralized political system consisting of a number of semiautonomous provinces, or cantons. Each province would resemble an American state and have its own educational system and police force. (S NF NC OC)

Sulayman Franjiyah has had little to say about political reform since his relations with other members of the Lebanese Front broke down in the summer of 1978. (S)

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The Order of Maronite Monks—also known as the Kaslik Front—supports an extreme form of decentralization. The Monks, led by Sharbal Qassis, argued at the 1977 meeting that the civil war has already produced de facto partition and called for a very loose confederation. The Monks were unclear on whether the national government or the local entities would be responsible for defense, foreign affairs, and finance. (C)

The non-Maronite Christian sects in Lebanon—Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Armenians—do not support partition, but they have not put forward precise plans for restructuring the Lebanese political system. The Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics, in particular, have little to gain from partition; their members are more dispersed than the Maronites, and most of them would be outside any Christian canton centered on the Maronite heartland. (C)

Dany Shamun, National Liberal militia chief. Unclassified ©

The Young National Liberals' Plan

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A working paper drawn up by Dany Shamun and other younger members of the National Liberal Party in early 1978 [redacted] provides the only evidence that some Maronites have had serious doubts about decentralization. We have no evidence, however, that the National Liberals ever seriously considered adopting the paper as party policy. (C)

The plan deals with apportioning power among the religious groups by re-forming national institutions rather than by transferring powers from the central government to local entities. The plan's major proposals include the creation of a post of vice president, which—by unwritten agreement among the major religious groups—would be held by a Druze, one of Lebanon's six main religious communities. According to the young National Liberals, the exclusion of the Druze from top political positions was a major defect of the old National Covenant. (C)

Another of the plan's proposals is the establishment of a bicameral legislature. A confessionally based senate would be created, with membership apportioned on the basis of the size of the religious communities. Dany Shamun said he evisaged the senate as a "parking lot" for all the old politicians—presumably including his father, Camille—who were out of touch with Lebanon's political realities. The senate would deal mainly with Lebanon's relations with the outside world, including foreign policy, emigration, and immigration. The members of the other house of parliament would be elected on a nonconfessional basis, but Shamun was vague about how this could be accomplished. (C)

A third proposal in Dany Shamun's plan is administrative decentralization. A governmental system would be adopted similar to that put forward by Pierre Jumayyil in 1977, but with considerably less devolution of power than called for by the Phalange leader. Four local units would be established, but they would be strictly administrative districts, taking their instructions directly from the central government. The government council in each district would be popularly elected. The central government would appoint all civil servants. (C)

Proposals of the Lebanese Left

While under the leadership of Kamal Jumblatt, the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP)—the political vehicle of the Druze community [2]—developed the most precise constitutional reform proposals of all the Lebanese leftist parties. Jumblatt was assassinated in 1977, but the PSP under his son Walid continues to support the same principles. (C)

The fundamental demand of the PSP is abolition of political sectarianism and complete secularization of the state—a proposal opposed by the Maronites as well as the traditional Muslim leadership. To accomplish these goals, the party called for:

- Elections to national office on the basis of proportional representation, with the entire country treated as one electoral constituency.

- Establishment of several new organs to provide checks on the powers of the central government, to supervise elections, and to guard against the illegal accumulation of wealth by national deputies.

- An increase in the power of the prime minister relative to that of the president, and the appointment of a vice president who would have the right to appeal the decisions of other government organs before a constitutional court.

- Election of the prime minister by the Chamber of Deputies, with the prime minister then selecting his cabinet. (C)

The PSP is also committed to a program of leftist reforms, which its leaders sometimes describe in extremist terms. Some of their rhetoric, however, is probably designed to cement the party's relations with its extreme leftist allies in the predominantly Muslim National Movement. The party in 1976 issued a comprehensive paper on its social and economic policies that, in fact, seemed no more radical than mainline Social Democratic thought in West European countries. (C)

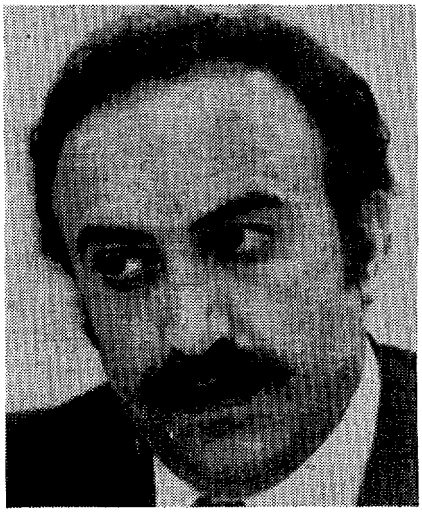
[2] The Druze religion is partly derived from Shia Islam, but the Druze do not regard themselves as Muslims, nor are they considered such by Muslims. (U)

Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Progressive Socialist Party. Unclassified ©

The other parties in the National Movement have been less specific than the PSP in expressing their ideas for a new political order. One of the most powerful parties is the Murabitun, a Nasirite organization, led by Ibrahim Qulaylat. Qulaylat rose to prominence mainly on the basis of his reputation as an aggressive street fighter, and he predictably devotes little attention to institutional reform. Qulaylat espouses rejection of the National Covenant and complete restructuring of the political system so as to destroy the privileged position of both the Christians and the traditional Muslim leadership. (C)

The major leftist Muslim political parties in Lebanon that are closely aligned with Damascus—the Syrian wing of the Lebanese Baath Party, led by Assam Qansu; the Union of Working Peoples Forces, led by Kamal Shatila; and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, commonly known as the PPS, led by Abdallah Saddah—continue to support the principles of the Syrian-backed Baabda Declaration. (S)

Ibrahim Qulaylat, Murabitun leader. Unclassified ©



Kamal Shatila, leader of the Union of Working Peoples Forces. Unclassified ©

Conservative Muslims' Proposals

Conservative Muslim leaders, who have formed a loose alliance called the Islamic Grouping, have made few specific proposals for institutional reform. Their passivity reflects the loss of influence they have sustained relative to younger Muslim leftist militia leaders. Lacking a strong constituency, the traditionalists must seek alliances with other groups, and apparently want to minimize the chance of antagonizing potential allies. The best settlement for them would probably be to keep largely intact the system established under the 1943 National Covenant, which provided them a privileged political position. They are willing to concede the presidency to the Maronites, but want more authority given to the Muslim prime minister. (s)

In their public statements the conservatives support a unified state, oppose partition, condemn both Muslim and Christian extremists, call for dialogue among the religious communities, and express the belief that Muslim-Christian cooperation can solve Lebanon's problems, if only the militants are neutralized. (c)

The Palestinian Issue

Christian and Muslim emotions are more aroused by the issue of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon than they are by the question of distribution of political power among the country's religious groups. Both Muslims and Christians reject the idea of a permanent presence of the Palestinians in Lebanon, but the Muslims support the Palestinian cause and are willing to allow the fedayeen to stay in Lebanon so long as Palestinian demands for a state of their own are unsatisfied. The Christians—especially the Maronites—simply want the Palestinians to go, and to go now. (s)

In the immediate aftermath of the civil war, some Maronites seemed willing at least to consider the possibility that progress toward Muslim-Christian reconciliation could be achieved separate from a solution to the Palestinian problem. At present, however, most Muslims and Christians have concluded that national entente is impossible until a comprehensive Middle East settlement takes care of the Palestinian problem. (s)

Some moderates in the Front are nevertheless still willing to accept an agreement with the Palestinians that would permit their continued presence, at least temporarily, without a permanent solution, but this is a distinctly minority viewpoint. The moderates' idea is to place the Palestinians in Lebanon nominally under the sovereignty of a Palestinian entity that would issue them passports or identity cards. This, it is hoped, would give the Palestinians a sense of security and status, encourage them to surrender their weapons, and eliminate their meddling in Lebanese politics. The Christian moderates have not specified what authority would issue the Palestinians passports, but apparently it would not need to be a state. (C)

The Maronites have also considered partition as a way of dealing with the Palestinians. They have held out the possibility of granting the Palestinians control over their own canton within Lebanon, but they have not irrevocably committed themselves to this formula. (S NF NC OC)

The Palestinians have offered no proposals for their role in Lebanon short of a general Middle East settlement. They are determined to keep their arms and retain their freedom of action. The improving military capabilities of the Christians has made the Palestinians even less willing to consider the implementation of the Cairo Accords, the agreements reached in 1969 and 1970 restricting Palestinian activity in Lebanon. (S)

Outlook

The strongly partisan proposals put forward for solving Lebanon's fundamental problems offer little room for compromise. The Christians will not support a settlement based on a mere revision of the 1943 National Covenant, and some movement toward meeting their demands for decentralization will be necessary. The main question is whether they can be persuaded to accept a decentralization scheme that leaves the central authority with enough powers to maintain its legitimacy as a government. (S)

The Muslims and Druze will not accept the Christians' more radical decentralization proposals, but they and the Christians might go along with a formula that combined some measure of decentralization with increased powers for the Muslim and Druze in the central government. Such a settlement might provide for:

- The establishment of local government units that would be given a significant degree of local autonomy.

- Continued apportionment of the top three government offices on the basis of religion, but with increased powers assigned to the Muslim prime minister.

- A guarantee that the Druze would be given at least one top political position.[3]

- Creation of a bicameral legislature with members of the upper house selected on a confessional basis [4] and members of the lower house elected on the basis of proportional representation. (S)

For now the various groups do not seem ready to talk about basic issues. Some preliminary steps will probably have to be taken before there can be any reasonable expectation of progress toward a settlement. Such steps could include:

- The appointment of a political cabinet representing most of the major groups.

- Rebuilding the Lebanese Army and allowing it to assume more security duties.

- Separation of Syrian troops and Christian militiamen in Beirut in order to ease tensions. (S)

[3] A grant of substantial executive power to a Druze at the same time the powers of the Muslim prime minister were increased, however, would risk political paralysis. The Druze might be satisfied by the creation of an office of vice president or deputy prime minister, to be held by a Druze. This official could be given special duties that would not interfere with the administrative responsibilities of the president and prime minister, such as the right, within defined limits to initiate legislation and to have his proposals given priority treatment by Parliament. (C)

[4] Establishment of an upper house would ease Christian fears of becoming a beleaguered minority in a Muslim-dominated state, especially if representatives of each religious community were given the right to veto legislation or constitutional proposals that threatened the community's basic interests. (S)

Progress toward devising a new national charter is unlikely without some effort to deal with the question of the Palestinians' future. The elimination of the Palestinian presence from Lebanon is not a near-term possibility. The best the Lebanese can expect is that moves toward a general settlement of the problem will induce significant numbers of fedayeen in Lebanon to accept stricter regulation and to abandon interference in Lebanese politics. Christians at that point might be willing to begin serious talks about a new national charter without insisting on Palestinian withdrawal from Lebanon. (s)

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